

Five Plays

by Lord Dunsany

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"The Gods of the Mountain"

"The Golden Doom"

"King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior"

"The Glittering Gate"

"The Lost Silk Hat"

The Gods of the Mountain

Persons

Agmar \

Slag |

Ulf |

Oogno |- Beggars

Thahn |

Mlan |

A Thief /

Oorander \

Illanaun |- Citizens

Akmos /

The Dromedary Men

Citizens, etc.

The Others

Scene: The East

The First Act

{Outside a city wall. Three beggars are seated upon the ground.}

Oogno:

These days are bad for beggary.

Thahn:

They are bad.

Ulf: {an older beggar but not gray}

Some evil has befallen the rich ones of this city.

They take no joy any longer in benevolence, but are become sour and miserly at heart. Alas for them! I sometimes sigh for them when I think of this.

Oogno:

Alas for them! A miserly heart must be a sore affliction.

Thahn:

A sore affliction indeed, and bad for our calling.

Oogno: {reflectively}

They have been thus for many months. What thing has befallen them?

Thahn:

Some evil thing.

Ulf:

There has been a comet come near to the earth of late and the earth has been parched and sultry so that the gods are drowsy and all those things that are divine in man, such as benevolence, drunkenness, extravagance, and song, have faded and died and have not been replenished by the gods.

Oogno:

It has indeed been sultry.

Thahn:

I have seen the comet o' nights.

Ulf:

The gods are drowsy.

Oogno:

If they awake not soon and make this city worthy again
of our order I for one shall forsake the calling and
buy a shop and sit at ease in the shade and barter for
gain.

Thahn:

You will keep a shop?

{Enter Agmar and Slag. Agmar, though poorly dressed,
is tall, imperious, and older than Ulf. Slag follows
behind him.}

Agmar:

Is this a beggar who speaks?

Oogno:

Yes, master, a poor beggar.

Agmar:

How long has the calling of beggary existed?

Oogno:

Since the building of the first city, master.

Agmar:

And when has a beggar ever followed a trade? When has he ever haggled and bartered and sat in a shop?

Oogno:

Why, he has never done so.

Agmar:

Are you he that shall be first to forsake the calling?

Oogno:

Times are bad for the calling here.

Thahn:

They are bad.

Agmar:

So you would forsake the calling?

Oogno:

The city is unworthy of our calling. The gods are drowsy and all that is divine in man is dead. {To third beggar} Are not the gods drowsy?

Ulf:

They are drowsy in their mountains away at Marma. The seven green idols are drowsy. Who is this that rebukes

us?

Thahn:

Are you some great merchant, master? Perhaps you will help a poor man that is starving.

Slag:

My master a merchant! No, no. He is no merchant. My master is no merchant.

Oogno:

I perceive that he is some lord in disguise. The gods have woken and sent him to save us.

Slag:

No, no. You do not know my master. You do not know him.

Thahn:

Is he the Soldan's self that has come to rebuke us?

Agmar:

I am a beggar, and an old beggar.

Slag: {with great pride}

There is none like my master. No traveller has met
with cunning like to his, not even those that come from
Aethiopia.

Ulf:

We make you welcome to our town, upon which an evil has
fallen, the days being bad for beggary.

Agmar:

Let none who has known the mystery of roads or has felt
the wind arising new in the morning, or who has called
forth out of the souls of men divine benevolence, ever
speak any more of any trade or of the miserable gains
of shops and the trading men.

Oogno:

I but spoke hastily, the times being bad.

Agmar:

I will put right the times.

Slag:

There is nothing that my master cannot do.

Agmar: {to Slag}

Be silent and attend to me. I do not know this city.

I have travelled from far, having somewhat exhausted
the city of Ackara.

Slag:

My master was three times knocked down and injured by
carriages there, once he was killed and seven times he
was beaten and robbed, and every time he was generously
compensated. He had nine diseases, many of them
mortal --

Agmar:

Be silent, Slag. -- Have you any thieves among the
calling here?

Ulf:

We have a few that we call thieves here, master, but
they would scarcely seem thieves to you. They are not
good thieves.

Agmar:

I shall need the best thief you have.

{Enter two citizens richly clad, Illanaun and
Oorander.}

Illanaun:

Therefore we will send galleons to Ardaspes.

Oorander:

Right to Ardaspes through the silver gates.

{Agmar transfers the thick handle of his long staff to his left armpit, he droops on to it and it supports his weight; he is upright no longer. His right arm hangs limp and useless. He hobbles up to the citizens imploring alms.}

Illanaun:

I am sorry. I cannot help you. There have been too many beggars here and we must decline alms for the good of the town.

Agmar: {sitting down and weeping}

I have come from far.

{Illanaun presently returns and gives Agmar a coin.

Exit Illanaun. Agmar, erect again, walks back to the others.}

Agmar:

We shall need fine raiment; let the thief start at

once. Let it rather be green raiment.

Beggar:

I will go and fetch the thief. {Exit}

Ulf:

We will dress ourselves as lords and impose upon the
city.

Oogno:

Yes, yes; we will say we are ambassadors from a far
land.

Ulf:

And there will be good eating.

Slag: {in an undertone to Ulf}

But you do not know my master. Now that you have
suggested that we go as lords, he will make a better
suggestion. He will suggest that we should go as
kings.

Ulf:

Beggars as kings!

Slag:

Ay. You do not know my master.

Ulf: {to Agmar}

What do you bid us do?

Agmar:

You shall first come by the fine raiment in the manner

I have mentioned.

Ulf:

And what then, master?

Agmar:

Why, we shall go as gods.

Beggars:

As gods!

Agmar:

As gods. Know you the land through which I have lately
come in my wanderings? Marma, where the gods are
carved from green stone in the mountains. They sit all
seven of them against the hills. They sit there
motionless and travellers worship them.

Ulf:

Yes, yes, we know those gods. They are much revered here, but they are drowsy and send us nothing beautiful.

Agmar:

They are of green jade. They sit cross-legged with their right elbows resting on their left hands, the right forefinger pointed upward. We will come into the city disguised, from the direction of Marma, and we will claim to be these gods. We must be seven as they are. And when we sit we must sit cross-legged as they do, with the right hand uplifted.

Ulf:

This is a bad city in which to fall into the hands of oppressors, for the judges lack amiability here as the merchants lack benevolence, ever since the gods forgot them.

Agmar:

In our ancient calling a man may sit at one street corner for fifty years doing the one thing, and yet a day may come when it is well for him to rise up and do another thing while the timorous man starves.

Ulf:

Also it were not well to anger the gods.

Agmar:

Is not all life a beggary to the gods? Do they not see
all men always begging of them and asking alms with
incense, and bells, and subtle devices?

Oogno:

Yes, all men indeed are beggars before the gods.

Agmar:

Does not the mighty Soldan often sit by the agate altar
in his royal temple as we sit at a street corner or by
a palace gate?

Ulf:

It is even so.

Agmar:

Then will the gods be glad when we follow the holy
calling with new devices and with subtlety, as they are
glad when the priests sing a new song.

Ulf:

Yet I have a fear.

{Enter two men talking.}

Agmar: {to Slag}

Go you into the city before us and let there be a
prophecy there which saith that the gods who are carven
from green rock in the mountain shall one day arise in
Marma and come here in the guise of men.

Slag:

Yes, master. Shall I make the prophecy myself? Or
shall it be found in some old document?

Agmar:

Let someone have seen it once in some rare document.
Let it be spoken of in the market place.

Slag:

It shall be spoken of, master.

{Slag lingers. Enter Thief and Thahn.}

Oogno:

This is our thief.

Agmar: {encouragingly}

Ah, he is a quick thief.

Thief:

I could only procure you three green raiments, master.

The city is not now well supplied with them; moreover,
it is a very suspicious city and without shame for the
baseness of its suspicions.

Slag: {to a beggar}

This is not thieving.

Thief:

I could do no more, master. I have not practised
thieving all my life.

Agmar:

You have got something: it may serve our purpose. How
long have you been thieving?

Thief:

I first stole when I was ten.

Slag: {in horror}

When he was ten!

Agmar:

We must tear them up and divide them amongst the seven. {To Thahn} Bring me another beggar.

Slag:

When my master was ten he had already to slip by night out of two cities.

Oogno: {admiringly}

Out of two cities?

Slag: {nodding his head}

In his native city they do not now know what became of the golden cup that stood in the Lunar Temple.

Agmar:

Yes, into seven pieces.

Ulf:

We will each wear a piece of it over our rags.

Oogno:

Yes, yes, we shall look fine.

Agmar:

That is not the way we shall disguise ourselves.

Oogno:

Not cover our rags?

Agmar:

No, no. The first who looked closely would say, "These are only beggars. They have disguised themselves."

Ulf:

What shall we do?

Agmar:

Each of the seven shall wear a piece of the green raiment underneath his rags. And peradventure here and there a little shall show through; and men shall say, "These seven have disguised themselves as beggars. But we know not what they be."

Slag:

Hear my wise master.

Oogno: {in admiration}

He is a beggar.

Ulf:

He is an *old* beggar.

{Curtain}

The Second Act

{The Metropolitan Hall of the city of Kongros. Citizens,

etc.

Enter the seven beggars with green silk under their rags.}

Oorander:

Who are you and whence come you?

Agmar:

Who may say what we are or whence we come?

Oorander:

What are these beggars and why do they come here?

Agmar:

Who said to you that we were beggars?

Oorander:

Why do these men come here?

Agmar:

Who said to you that we were men?

Illanaun:

Now, by the moon!

Agmar:

My sister.

Illanaun:

What?

Agmar:

My little sister.

Slag:

Our little sister the moon. She comes to us at
evenings away in the mountains of Marma. She trips

over the mountains when she is young. When she is
young and slender she comes and dances before us, and
when she is old and unshapely she hobbles away from the
hills.

Agmar:

Yet is she young again and forever nimble with youth;
yet she comes dancing back. The years are not able to
curb her nor to bring gray hairs to her brethren.

Oorander:

This is not wanted.

Illanaun:

It is not in accordance with custom.

Akmos:

Prophecy hath not thought it.

Slag:

She comes to us new and nimble, remembering olden
loves.

Oorander:

It were well that prophets should come and speak to us.

Illanaun:

This hath not been in the past. Let prophets come.

Let prophets speak to us of future things.

{The beggars seat themselves upon the floor in the
attitude of the seven gods of Marma.}

Citizen:

I heard men speak today in the market place. They
speak of a prophecy read somewhere of old. It says the
seven gods shall come from Marma in the guise of men.

Illanaun:

Is this a true prophecy?

Oorander:

It is all the prophecy we have. Man without prophecy
is like a sailor going by night over uncharted seas.

He knows not where are the rocks nor where the havens.

To the man on watch all things are black and the stars
guide him not, for he knows not what they are.

Illanaun:

Should we not investigate this prophecy?

Oorander:

Let us accept it. It is as the small, uncertain light
of a lantern, carried as it may be by a drunkard, but
along the shore of some haven. Let us be guided.

Akmos:

It may be that they are but benevolent gods.

Agmar:

There is no benevolence greater than our benevolence.

Illanaun:

Then we need do little: they portend no danger to us.

Agmar:

There is no anger greater than our anger.

Oorander:

Let us make sacrifices to them if they be gods.

Akmos:

We humbly worship you, if ye be gods.

Illanaun: {kneeling too}

You are mightier than all men and hold high rank among

other gods and are lords of this our city, and have the
thunder as your plaything and the whirlwind and the
eclipse and all the destinies of human tribes -- if ye
be gods.

Agmar:

Let the pestilence not fall at once on this city, as it
had indeed designed to; let not the earthquake swallow
it all immediately up amid the howls of the thunder;
let not infuriated armies overwhelm those that escape
-- if we be gods --

Populace: {in horror}

If we be gods!

Oorander:

Come, let us sacrifice.

Illanaun:

Bring lambs!

Akmos:

Quick! Quick! {Exuent some}

Slag: {with solemn air}

This god is a very divine god.

Thahn:

He is no common god.

Mlan:

Indeed, he has made us.

Citizen: {to Slag}

He will not punish us, master? None of the gods will
punish us? We will make a sacrifice, a good sacrifice.

Another:

We will sacrifice a lamb that the priests have blessed.

First citizen:

Master, you are not wroth with us?

Slag:

Who may say what cloudy dooms are rolling up in the
mind of the eldest of the gods? He is not common god
like us. Once a shepherd went by him in the mountains
and doubted. He sent a doom after that shepherd.

Citizen:

Master, we have not doubted.

Slag:

And the doom found him on the hills at evening.

Second citizen:

It shall be a good sacrifice, master.

{Reenter with a dead lamb and fruits. They offer the
lamb on an altar where there is fire, and fruits before
the altar.}

Thahn: {stretching out a hand to a lamb upon an altar}

That leg is not being cooked at all.

Illanaun:

It is strange that gods should be thus anxious about
the cooking of a leg of lamb.

Oorander:

It is strange certainly.

Illanaun:

Almost I had said that it was a man that spoke then.

Oorander: {stroking his beard and regarding the second
beggar}

Strange. Strange, certainly.

Agmar:

Is it then strange that the gods love roasted flesh?
For this purpose they keep the lightning. When the
lightning flickers about the limbs of men there comes
to the gods of Marma a pleasant smell, even a smell of
roasting. Sometimes the gods, being pacific, are
pleased to have roasted instead the flesh of lamb. It
is all one to the gods; let the roasting stop.

Oorander:

No, no, gods of the mountains!

Others:

No, no.

Oorander:

Quick, let us offer flesh to them. If they eat, all is
well.

{They offer it; the beggars eat, all but Agmar, who
watches.}

Illanaun:

One who was ignorant, one who did not know, had almost
said that they ate like hungry men.

Others:

Hush!

Akmos:

Yet they look as though they had not had a meal like
this for a long time.

Oorander:

They have a hungry look.

Agmar: {who has not eaten}

I have not eaten since the world was very new and the
flesh of men was tenderer than now. These younger gods
have learned the habit of eating from the lions.

Oorander:

O oldest of divinities, partake, partake.

Agmar:

It is not fitting that such as I should eat. None eat
but beasts and men and the younger gods. The sun and
the moon and the nimble lightning and I -- we may kill
and we may madden, but we do not eat.

Akmos:

If he but eat of our offering he cannot overwhelm us.

All:

Oh, ancient deity, partake, partake.

Agmar:

Enough. Let it be enough that these have condescended
to this bestial and human habit.

Illanaun: {to Akmos}

And yet he is not unlike a beggar whom I saw not so
long since.

Oorander:

But beggars eat.

Illanaun:

Now I never knew a beggar yet who would refuse a bowl
of Woldery wine.

Akmos:

This is no beggar.

Illanaun:

Nevertheless let us offer him a bowl of Woldery wine.

Akmos:

You do wrong to doubt him.

Illanaun:

I do but wish to prove his divinity. I will fetch the
Woldery wine. {Exit}

Akmos:

He will not drink. Yet if he does, then he will not
overwhelm us. Let us offer him the wine.

{Reenter Illanaun with a goblet.}

First beggar:

It is Woldery wine!

Second beggar:

It is Woldery!

Third beggar:

A goblet of Woldery wine!

Fourth beggar:

O blessed day!

Mlan:

O happy times!

Slag:

O my wise master!

{Illanaun takes the goblet. All the beggars stretch out their hands including Agmar. Illanaun gives it to Agmar. Agmar takes it solemnly, and very carefully pours it out on the ground.}

First beggar:

He has spilt it.

Second beggar:

He has spilt it. {Agmar sniffs the fumes, loquitur}

Agmar:

It is a fitting libation. Our anger is somewhat appeased.

Another beggar:

But it was Woldery!

Akmos: {kneeling to Agmar}

Master, I am childless, and I --

Agmar:

Trouble us not now. It is the hour at which the gods
are accustomed to speak to the gods in the language of
the gods, and if Man heard us he would guess the
futility of his destiny, which were not well for Man.

Begone! Begone!

One lingers {loquitur}

Master --

Agmar:

Begone!

{Exeunt. Agmar takes up a piece of meat and begins to
eat it; the beggars rise and stretch themselves; they
laugh, but Agmar eats hungrily.}

Oogno:

Ah! Now we have come into our own.

Thahn:

Now we have alms.

Slag:

Master! My wise master!

Ulf:

These are the good days, the good days; and yet I have
a fear.

Slag:

What do you fear? There is nothing to fear. No man is
as wise as my master.

Ulf:

I fear the gods whom we pretend to be.

Slag:

The gods?

Agmar: {taking a chunk of meat from his lips}

Come hither, Slag.

Slag: {going up to him}

Yes, master.

Agmar:

Watch in the doorway while I eat. {Slag goes to the doorway} Sit in the attitude of a god. Warn me if any of the citizens approach.

{Slag sits in the doorway in the attitude of a god, back to the audience.

Oogno: {to Agmar}

But, master, shall we not have Woldery wine?

Agmar:

We shall have all things if only we are wise at first for a little.

Thahn:

Master, do any suspect us?

Agmar:

We must be **very** wise.

Thahn:

But if we are not wise, master?

Agmar:

Why, then death may come to us --

Thahn:

O master!

Agmar:

-- slowly.

{All stir uneasily except Slag, who sits motionless in
the doorway.}

Oogno:

Do they believe us, master?

Slag: {half turning his head}

Someone comes.

{Slag resumes his position.}

Agmar: {putting away his meat}

We shall soon know now.

{All take up the attitude. Enter One, loquiter.}

One:

Master, I want the god that does not eat.

Agmar:

I am he.

One:

Master, my child was bitten in the throat by a
death-adder at noon. Spare him, master; he still
breathes, but slowly.

Agmar:

Is he indeed your child?

One:

He is surely my child, master.

Agmar:

Was it your wont to thwart him at his play, while he
was strong and well?

One:

I never thwarted him, master.

Agmar:

Whose child is Death?

One:

Death is the child of the gods.

Agmar:

Do you that never thwarted your child in his play ask
this of the gods?

One: {with some horror, perceiving Agmar's meaning}

Master!

Agmar:

Weep not. For all the houses that men have builded are
the play-fields of this child of the gods.

{The Man goes away in silence, not weeping.}

Oogno: {taking Thahn by the wrist}

Is this indeed a man?

Agmar:

A man, a man, and until just now a hungry one.

{Curtain}

The Third Act

{Same room.

A few days have elapsed.

Seven thrones shaped like mountain-crags stand along the back of the stage. On these the beggars are lounging. The Thief is absent.}

Mlan:

Never had beggars such a time.

Oogno:

Ah, the fruits and tender lamb!

Thahn:

The Woldery wine!

Slag:

It was better to see my master's wise devices than to have fruit and lamb and Woldery wine.

Mlan:

Ah! When they spied on him to see if he would eat when
they went away!

Oogno:

When they questioned him concerning the gods and Man!

Thahn:

When they asked him why the gods permitted cancer!

Slag:

Ah, my wise master!

Mlan:

How well his scheme has succeeded!

Oogno:

How far away is hunger!

Thahn:

It is even like to one of last year's dreams, the
trouble of a brief night long ago.

Oogno: {laughing}

Ho, ho, ho! To see them pray to us.

Agmar:

When we were beggars did we not speak as beggars? Did we not whine as they? Was not our mien beggarly?

Oogno:

We were the pride of our calling.

Agmar:

Then now that we are gods, let us be as gods, and not mock our worshippers.

Ulf:

I think that the gods *do* mock their worshippers.

Agmar:

The gods have never mocked us. We are above all pinnacles that we have ever gazed at in dreams.

Ulf:

I think that when man is high then most of all are the gods wont to mock him.

Thief: {entering}

Master! I have been with those that know all and see all. I have been with the thieves, master. They know me for one of the craft, but they do not know me as

being one of us.

Agmar:

Well, well!

Thief:

There is danger, master, there is great danger.

Agmar:

You mean that they suspect we are men.

Thief:

That they have long done, master. I mean that they will know it. Then we are lost.

Agmar:

Then they do not know it.

Thief:

They do not know it yet, but they will know it, and we are lost.

Agmar:

When will they know it?

Thief:

Three days ago they suspected us.

Agmar:

More than you think suspected us, but have any dared to say so?

Thief:

No, master.

Agmar:

Then forget your fears, my thief.

Thief:

Two men went on dromedaries three days ago to see if the gods were still at Marma.

Agmar:

They went to Marma!

Thief:

Yes, three days ago.

Oogno:

We are lost!

Agmar:

They went three days ago?

Thief:

Yes, on dromedaries.

Agmar:

Then they should be back to-day.

Oogno:

We are lost!

Thahn:

We are lost!

Thief:

They must have seen the green jade idols sitting
against the mountains. They will say, "The gods are
still at Marma." And we shall be burnt.

Slag:

My master will yet devise a plan.

Agmar: {to the Thief}

Slip away to some high place and look toward the desert

and see how long we have to devise a plan.

Slag:

My master will find a plan.

Oogno:

He has taken us into a trap.

Thahn:

His wisdom is our doom.

Slag:

He will find a wise plan yet.

Thief: {reentering}

It is too late!

Agmar:

It is too late!

Thief:

The dromedary men are here.

Oogno:

We are lost!

Agmar:

Be quiet! I must think.

{They all sit still. Citizens enter and prostrate themselves. Agmar sits deep in thought.}

Illanaun: {to Agmar}

Two holy pilgrims have gone to your sacred shrines,
wherein you were wont to sit before you left the
mountains. {Agmar says nothing} They return even now.

Agmar:

They left us here and went to find the gods? A fish
once took a journey into a far country to find the sea.

Illanaun:

Most reverend deity, their piety is so great that they
have gone to worship even your shrines.

Agmar:

I know these men that have great piety. Such men have
often prayed to me before, but their prayers are not
acceptable. They little love the gods; their only care
is their piety. I know these pious ones. They will
say that the seven gods were still at Marma. They will

lie and say that we were still at Marma. So shall they
seem more pious than you all, pretending that they
alone have seen the gods. Fools shall believe them and
share in their damnation.

Oorander: {to Illanaun}

Hush! You anger the gods.

Illanaun:

I am not sure who I anger.

Oorander:

It may be they are the gods.

Illanaun:

Where are these men from Marma?

Citizen:

Here are the dromedary men; they are coming now.

Illanaun: {to Agmar}

The holy pilgrims from your shrine are come to worship
you.

Agmar:

The men are doubters. How the gods hate the word!

Doubt ever contaminated virtue. Let them be cast into prison and not besmirch your purity. {Rising} Let them not enter here.

Illanaun:

But oh, most reverend deity from the Mountain, we also doubt, most reverend deity.

Agmar:

You have chosen. You have chosen. And yet it is not too late. Repent and cast these men into prison and it may not be too late. *The gods have never wept.* And yet when they think upon damnation and the dooms that are withering a myriad bones, then almost, were they not divine, they could weep. Be quick! Repent of your doubt.

{Enter the Dromedary Men.}

Illanaun:

Most reverend deity, it is a mighty doubt.

Citizens:

Nothing has killed him! They are not the gods!

Slag: {to Agmar}

You have a plan, my master. You have a plan.

Agmar:

Not yet, Slag.

Illanaun: {to Oorander}

These are the men that went to the shrines at Marma.

Oorander: {in a loud, clear voice}

Were the Gods of the Mountain seated still at Marma, or
were they not there?

{The beggars get hurriedly up from their thrones.}

Dromedary Man:

They were not there.

Illanaun:

They were not there?

Dromedary Man:

Their shrines were empty.

Oorander:

Behold the Gods of the Mountain!

Akmos:

They have indeed come from Marma.

Oorander:

Come. Let us go away to prepare a sacrifice. A mighty
sacrifice to atone for our doubting. {Exeunt.}

Slag:

My most wise master!

Agmar:

No, no, Slag. I do not know what has befallen. When I
went by Marma only two weeks ago the idols of green
jade were still seated there.

Oogno:

We are saved now.

Thahn:

Ay, we are saved.

Agmar:

We are saved, but I know not how.

Oogno:

Never had beggars such a time.

Thief:

I will go out and watch. {He creeps out.}

Ulf:

Yet I have a fear.

Oogno:

A fear? Why, we are saved.

Ulf:

Last night I dreamed.

Oogno:

What was your dream?

Ulf:

It was nothing. I dreamed that I was thirsty and one
gave me Woldery wine; yet there was a fear in my dream.

Thahn:

When I drink Woldery I am afraid of nothing.

Thief: {reentering}

They are making a pleasant banquet ready for us; they
are killing lambs, and girls are there with fruits, and
there is to be much Woldery wine.

Mlan:

Never had beggars such a time.

Agmar:

Do any doubt us now?

Thief:

I do not know.

Mlan:

When will the banquet be?

Thief:

When the stars come out.

Oogno:

Ah! It is sunset already. There will be good eating.

Thahn:

We shall see the girls come in with baskets upon their
heads.

Oogno:

There will be fruits in the baskets.

Thahn:

All the fruits of the valley.

Mlan:

Oh, how long we have wandered along the ways of the
world!

Slag:

Oh, how hard they were!

Thahn:

And how dusty!

Oogno:

And how little wine!

Mlan:

How long have we asked and asked, and for how much!

Agmar:

We to whom all things are coming at last!

Thief:

I fear lest my art forsake me now that good things come
without stealing.

Agmar:

You will need your art no longer.

Slag:

The wisdom of my master shall suffice us all our days.

{Enter a frightened Man. He kneels before Agmar and
abases his forehead.}

Man:

Master, we implore you, the people beseech you.

{Agmar and the beggars in the attitude of the gods sit
silent.}

Man:

Master, it is terrible. {The beggars maintain
silence.} It is terrible when you wander in the
evening. It is terrible on the edge of the desert in
the evening. Children die when they see you.

Agmar:

In the desert? When did you see us?

Man:

Last night, master. You were terrible last night. You were terrible in the gloaming. When your hands were stretched out and groping. You were feeling for the city.

Agmar:

Last night do you say?

Man:

You were terrible in the gloaming!

Agmar:

You yourself saw us?

Man:

Yes, master, you were terrible. Children too saw you and they died.

Agmar:

You say you saw us?

Man:

Yes, master. Not as you are now, but otherwise. We
implore you, master, not to wander at evening. You are
terrible in the gloaming. You are --

Agmar:

You say we appeared not as we now are. How did we
appear to you?

Man:

Otherwise, master, otherwise.

Agmar:

But how did we appear to you?

Man:

You were all green, master, all green in the gloaming,
all of rock again as you used to be in the mountains.
Master, we can bear to see you in flesh like men, but
when we see rock walking it is terrible,
it is terrible.

Agmar:

That is how we appeared to you?

Man:

Yes, master. Rock should not walk. When children see it they do not understand. Rock should not walk in the evening.

Agmar:

There have been doubters of late. Are they satisfied?

Man:

Master, they are terrified. Spare us, master.

Agmar:

It is wrong to doubt. Go and be faithful.

{Exit Man.}

Slag:

What have they seen, master?

Agmar:

They have seen their own fears dancing in the desert.

They have seen something green after the light was gone, and some child has told them a tale that it was us. I do not know what they have seen. What should they have seen?

Ulf:

Something was coming this way from the desert, he said.

Slag:

What should come from the desert?

Agmar:

They are a foolish people.

Ulf:

That man's white face has seen some frightful thing.

Agmar:

It is only we that have frightened them and their fears
have made them foolish.

{Enter an Attendant with a torch or lantern which he
places in a receptacle. Exit.}

Thahn:

Now we shall see the faces of the girls when they come
to the banquet.

Mlan:

Never had beggars such a time.

Agmar:

Hark! They are coming. I hear footsteps.

Thahn:

The dancing girls! They are coming!

Thief:

There is no sound of flutes, they said they would come
with music.

Oogno:

What heavy boots they have; they sound like feet of
stone.

Thahn:

I do not like to hear their heavy tread. Those that
would dance to *us* must be light of foot.

Agmar:

I shall not smile at them if they are not airy.

Mlan:

They are coming very slowly. They should come nimbly
to us.

Ulf: {in a loud voice, almost chanting}

I have a fear, an old fear and a boding. We have done
ill in the sight of the seven gods. Beggars we were
and beggars we should have remained. We have given up
our calling and come in sight of our doom. I will not
longer let my fear be silent; it shall run about and
cry; it shall go from me crying, like a dog from a
doomed city; for my fear has seen calamity and has
known an evil thing.

Slag: {hoarsely}

Master!

Agmar: {rising}

Come, come!

{They listen. No one speaks. The stony boots come
on. Enter in single file through door in right of
back, a procession of seven green men, even hands and
faces are green; they wear greenstone sandals; they
walk with knees extremely wide apart, as having sat
cross-legged for centuries; their right arms and right
forefingers point upward, right elbows resting on right
hands; they stoop grotesquely. Halfway to the
footlights they left wheel. They pass in front of the
seven beggars, now in terrified attitudes, and six of

them sit down in the attitude described, with their backs to the audience. The leader stands, still stooping.}

Oogno: {cries out just as they wheel left}

The Gods of the Mountain!

Agmar: {hoarsely}

Be still! They are dazzled by the light. They may not see us.

{The leading Green Thing points his finger at the lantern -- the flame turns green. When the six are seated the leader points one by one at each of the seven beggars, shooting out his forefinger at them. As he does this each beggar in his turn gathers himself back on to his throne and crosses his legs, his right arm goes stiffly upward with forefinger erect, and a staring look of horror comes into his eyes. In this attitude the beggars sit motionless while a green light falls upon their faces. The gods go out.

Presently enter the Citizens, some with victuals and fruit. One touches a beggars arm and then another's.}

Citizen:

They are cold; they have turned to stone.

{All abase themselves, foreheads to the floor.}

One:

We have doubted them. We have doubted them. They
have turned to stone because we have doubted them.

Another:

They were the true gods.

All:

They were the true gods.

{Curtain}

The Golden Doom

Persons

The King

Chamberlain

Chief Prophet

Girl

Boy

Spies

First Prophet

Second Prophet

First Sentry

Second Sentry

Stranger

Attendants

Scene: Outside the King's great door in Zericon.

Time: Some while before the fall of Babylon.

{Two Sentries pace to and fro, then halt, one on each side
of the great door.}

First Sentry:

The day is deadly sultry.

Second Sentry:

I would that I were swimming down the Gyshon, on the
cool side, under the fruit trees.

First Sentry:

It is like to thunder or the fall of a dynasty.

Second Sentry:

It will grow cool by night-fall. Where is the King?

First Sentry:

He rows in his golden barge with ambassadors or
whispers with captains concerning future wars. The
stars spare him!

Second Sentry:

Why do you say "the stars spare him"?

First Sentry:

Because if a doom from the stars fall suddenly on a king it swallows up his people and all things round about him, and his palace falls and the walls of his city and citadel, and the apes come in from the woods and the large beasts from the desert, so that you would not say that a king had been there at all.

Second Sentry:

But why should a doom from the stars fall on the King?

First Sentry:

Because he seldom placates them.

Second Sentry:

Ah! I have heard that said of him.

First Sentry:

Who are the stars that a man should scorn them? Should they that rule the thunder, the plague and the earthquake withhold these things save for much prayer? Always ambassadors are with the King, and his commanders, come in from distant lands, prefects of cities and makers of the laws, but never the priests of the stars.

Second Sentry:

Hark! Was that thunder?

First Sentry:

Believe me, the stars are angry.

{Enter a Stranger. He wanders towards the King's door,
gazing about him.}

Sentries: {lifting their spears at him}

Go back! Go back!

Stranger:

Why?

First Sentry:

It is death to touch the King's door.

Stranger:

I am a stranger from Thessaly.

First Sentry:

It is death even for a stranger.

Stranger:

Your door is strangely sacred.

First Sentry:

It is death to touch it.

{The Stranger wanders off.}

{Enter two children hand in hand.}

Boy: {to the Sentry}

I want to see the King to pray for a hoop.

{The Sentry smiles.}

Boy: {pushes the door; to girl}

I cannot open it. {To the Sentry} Will it do as well
if I pray to the King's door?

Sentry:

Yes, quite as well. {Turns to talk to the other

Sentry} Is there anyone in sight?

Second Sentry: {shading his eyes}

Nothing but a dog, and he far out on the plain.

First Sentry:

Then we can talk awhile and eat bash.

Buy:

King's door, I want a little hoop.

{The Sentries take a little bash between finger and
thumb from pouches and put that wholly forgotten drug
to their lips.}

Girl: {pointing}

My father is a taller soldier than that.

Boy:

My father can write. He taught me.

Girl:

Ho! Writing frightens nobody. My father is a soldier.

Boy:

I have a lump of gold. I found it in stream that runs
down to Gyshon.

Girl:

I have a poem. I found it in my own head.

Boy:

Is it a long poem?

Girl:

No. But it would have been only there were no more
rhymes for sky.

Boy:

What is your poem?

Girl:

I saw a purple bird
Go up against the sky
And it went up and up
And round about did fly.

Boy:

I saw it die.

Girl:

That does n't scan.

Boy:

Oh, that does n't matter.

Girl:

Do you like my poem?

Boy:

Birds are n't purple.

Girl:

My bird was.

Boy:

Oh!

Girl:

Oh, you don't like my poem!

Boy:

Yes, I do.

Girl:

No, you don't; you think it horrid.

Boy:

No. I don't.

Girl:

Yes, you do. Why did n't you say you liked it? It is
the only poem I ever made.

Boy:

I do like it. I do like it.

Girl:

You don't, you don't!

Boy:

Don't be angry. I'll write it on the door for you.

Girl:

You'll write it?

Boy:

Yes, I can write. My father taught me. I'll write it
with my lump of gold. It makes a yellow mark on the
iron door.

Girl:

Oh, do write it! I would like to see it written like
real poetry.

{The Boy begins to write. The Girl watches.}

First Sentry:

You see, we'll be fighting again soon.

Second Sentry:

Only a little war. We never have more than a little
war with the hill-folk.

First Sentry:

When a man goes to fight, the curtains of the gods wax
thicker than ever before between his eyes and the
future; he may go to a great or to a little war.

Second Sentry:

There can only be a little war with the hill-folk.

First Sentry:

Yet sometimes the gods laugh.

Second Sentry:

At whom?

First Sentry:

At kings.

Second Sentry:

Why have you grown uneasy about this war in the hills?

First Sentry:

Because the King is powerful beyond any of his fathers,
and has more fighting men, more horses, and wealth that
could have ransomed his father and his grandfather and
dowered their queens and daughters; and every year his
miners bring him more from the opal-mines and from the
turquoise-quarries. He has grown very mighty.

Second Sentry:

Then he will the more easily crush the hill-folk in a
little war.

First Sentry:

When kings grow very mighty the stars grow very
jealous.

Boy:

I've written your poem.

Girl:

Oh, have you really?

Boy:

Yes, I'll read it to you. {He reads}

I saw a purple bird

Go up against the sky

And it went up and up

And round about did fly.

I saw it die.

Girl:

It does n't scan.

Boy:

That does n't matter.

{Enter furtively a Spy, who crosses stage and goes
out. The Sentries cease to talk.}

Girl:

That man frightens me.

Boy:

He is only one of the King's spies.

Girl:

But I don't like the King's spies. They frighten me.

Boy:

Come on, then, we'll run away.

Sentry: {noticing the children again}

Go away, go away! The King is coming, he will eat you.

{The Boy throws a stone at the Sentry and runs out.

Enter another Spy, who notices the door. He examines it and utters an owl-like whistle. No. 2 comes back.

They do not speak. Both whistle. No. 3 comes. All examine the door. Enter the King and his Chamberlain.

The King wears a purple robe. The Sentries smartly transfer their spears to their left hands and return their right arms to their right sides. They then lower their spears until their points are within an inch of the ground, at the same time raising their right hands above their heads. They stand for some moments thus.

Then they lower their right arms to their right sides, at the same time raising their spears. In the next motion they take their spears into their right hands and lower the butts to the floor, where they were before, the spears slanting forward a little. Both Sentries must move together precisely.}

First Spy: {runs forward to the King and kneels, abasing his forehead to the floor} Something has written on the iron door.

Chamberlain:

On the iron door!

King:

Some fool has done it. Who has been here since
yesterday?

First Sentry: {shifts his hand a little higher on his spear,
brings the spear to his side and closes his heels all
in one motion; he then takes one pace backward with his
right foot; then he kneels on his right knee; when he
has done these he speaks, but not before}
Nobody, Majesty, but a stranger from Thessaly.

King:

Did he touch the iron door?

First Sentry:

No, Majesty; he tried to, but we drove him away.

King:

How near did he come?

First Sentry:

Nearly to our spears, Majesty.

King:

What was his motive in seeking to touch the iron door?

First Sentry:

I do not know, Majesty.

King:

Which way did he go?

First Sentry: {pointing left}

That way, Majesty, an hour ago.

{The King whispers with one of his Spies, who stoops and examines the ground and steals away. The Sentry rises.}

King: {to his two remaining Spies}

What does this writing say?

A Spy:

We cannot read, Majesty.

King:

A good spy should know everything.

Second Spy:

We watch, Majesty, and we search out, Majesty. We read shadows, and we read footprints, and whispers in secret places. But we do not read writing.

King: {to the Chamberlain}

See what it is.

Chamberlain: {goes up and reads}

It is treason, Majesty.

King:

Read it.

Chamberlain:

I saw a purple bird

Go up against the sky

And it went up and up

And round about did fly.

I saw it die.

First Sentry: {aside}

The stars have spoken.

King: {to the Sentry}

Has anyone been here but the stranger from Thessaly?

Sentry: {kneeling as before}

Nobody, Majesty.

King:

You saw nothing?

First Sentry:

Nothing but a dog far out upon the plain and the
children of the guard at play.

King: {to the Second Sentry}

And you?

Second Sentry: {kneeling}

Nothing, Majesty.

Chamberlain:

That is strange.

King:

It is some secret warning.

Chamberlain:

It is treason.

King:

It is from the stars.

Chamberlain:

No, no, Majesty. Not from the stars, not from the stars. Some man has done it. Yet the thing should be interpreted. Shall I send for the prophets of the stars?

{The King beckons to his Spies. They run up to him.}

King:

Find me some prophet of the stars. {Exeunt Spies} I fear that we may go no more, my chamberlain, along the winding ways of unequalled Zericon, nor play dahoori with the golden balls. I have thought more of my people than of the stars and more of Zericon than of windy Heaven.

Chamberlain:

Believe me, Majesty, some idle man has written it and passed by. Your spies shall find him, and then his name will be soon forgotten.

King:

Yes, yes. Perhaps you are right, though the sentries
saw no one. No doubt some beggar did it.

Chamberlain:

Yes, Majesty, some beggar has surely done it. But
look, here come two prophets of the stars. They shall
tell us that this is idle.

{Enter two Prophets and a Boy attending them. All bow
deeply to the King. The two Spies steal in again and
stand at back.}

King:

Some beggar has written a rhyme on the iron gate, and
as the ways of rhyme are known to you I desired you,
rather as poets than as prophets, to say whether there
was any meaning in it.

Chamberlain:

'T is but an idle rhyme.

First Prophet: {bows again and goes up to the door. He
glances at the writing} Come hither, servant of those
that serve the stars.

{Attendant approaches.}

First Prophet:

Bring hither our golden cloaks, for this may be a matter for rejoicing; and bring our green cloaks also, for this may tell of young new beautiful things with which the stars will one day gladden the King; and bring our black cloaks also, for it may be a doom.

{Exit the Boy; the Prophet goes up to the door and reads solemnly} The stars have spoken.

King:

I tell you that some beggar has written this.

First Prophet:

It is written in pure gold. {He dons the black cloak over body and head}

King:

What do the stars mean? What warning is it?

First Prophet:

I cannot say.

King: {to Second Prophet}

Come you then and tell us what the warning is.

Second Prophet:

The stars have spoken. {He cloaks himself in black}

King:

What is it? What does it mean?

Second Prophet:

We do not know, but it is from the stars.

Chamberlain:

It is a harmless thing; there is no harm in it,

Majesty. Why should not birds die?

King:

Why have the prophets covered themselves in black?

Chamberlain:

They are a secret people and look for inner meanings.

There is no harm in it.

King:

They have covered themselves in black.

Chamberlain:

They have not spoken of any evil thing. They have not

spoken of it.

King:

If the people see the prophets covered in black they will say that the stars are against me and believe that my luck has turned.

Chamberlain:

The people must not know.

King:

Some prophet must interpret to us the doom. Let the chief prophet of the stars be sent for.

Chamberlain: {going toward left exit}

Summon the chief prophet of the stars that look on Zericon.

Voices off:

The chief prophet of the stars. The chief prophet of the stars.

Chamberlain:

I have summoned the chief prophet, Majesty.

King:

If he interpret this aright I will put a necklace of
turquoises round his neck with opals from the mines.

Chamberlain:

He will not fail. He is a very cunning interpreter.

King:

What if he covers himself with a huge black cloak and
does not speak and goes muttering away, slowly with
bended head, till our fear spreads to the sentries and
they cry aloud?

Chamberlain:

This is no doom from the stars, but some idle scribe
hath written it in his insolence upon the iron door,
wasting his hoard of gold.

King:

Not for myself I have a fear of doom, not for myself;
but I have inherited a rocky land, windy and
ill-nurtured, and nursed it to prosperity by years of
peace and spread its boundaries by years of war. I
have brought up harvests out of barren acres and given
good laws unto naughty towns, and my people are happy,
and lo, the stars are angry!

Chamberlain:

It is not the stars, it is not the stars, Majesty, for
the prophets of the stars have not interpreted it.
Indeed, it was some reveller wasting his gold.

{Meanwhile enter Chief Prophet of the stars that look
on Zericon.}

King:

Chief Prophet of the stars that look on Zericon, I
would have you interpret the rhyme upon yonder door.

Chief Prophet: {goes up to door and reads}

It is from the stars.

King:

Interpret it and you shall have great turquoises round
your neck, with opals from the mines in the frozen
mountains.

Chief Prophet: {cloaks himself like the others in a great
black cloak} Who should wear purple in the land but a
King, or who should go up against the sky but one who
has troubled the stars by neglecting their ancient

worship? Such a one has gone up and up increasing in power and wealth, such a one has soared above the crowns of those that went before him, such a one the stars have doomed, the undying ones, the illustrious.

{A pause.}

King:

Who wrote it?

Chief Prophet:

It is pure gold. Some god has written it.

Chamberlain:

Some god?

First Sentry: {aside to Second Sentry}

Last night I saw a star go flaming earthward.

King:

Is this a warning or is it a doom?

Chief Prophet:

The stars have spoken.

King:

Is it, then, a doom?

Chief Prophet:

They speak not in jest.

King:

I have been a great King -- Let it be said of me "The stars overthrew him, and they sent a god for his doom." For I have not met my equal among kings that man should overthrow me; and I have not oppressed my people that man should rise up against me.

Chief Prophet:

It is better to give worship to the stars than to do good to man. It is better to be humble before the gods than proud in the face of your enemy though he do evil.

King:

Let the stars hearken yet and I will sacrifice a child to them -- I will sacrifice a girl child to the twinkling stars and a male child to the stars that blink not, the stars of the steadfast eyes. {To his Spies} Let a boy and a girl be brought for sacrifice. {Exit a Spy to the right looking at footprints.} Will you accept this sacrifice to the god that the stars

have sent? They say that the gods love children.

Chief Prophet:

I may refuse no sacrifice to the stars nor to the gods
whom they send. {To the other Prophets} Make ready
the sacrificial knives.

{The Prophets draw knives and sharpen them.}

King:

Is it fitting that the sacrifice take place by the iron
door where the god from the stars has trod, or must it
be in the temple?

Chief Prophet:

Let it be offered by the iron door. {To the other
Prophets} Fetch hither the altar stone.

{The owl-like whistle is heard off right. The Third
Spy runs crouching toward it. Exit.}

King:

Will this sacrifice avail to avert the doom?

Chief Prophet:

Who knows?

King:

I fear that even yet the doom will fall.

Chief Prophet:

It were wise to sacrifice some greater thing.

King:

What more can a man offer?

Chief Prophet:

His pride.

King:

What pride?

Chief Prophet:

Your pride that went up against the sky and troubled
the stars.

King:

How shall I sacrifice my pride to the stars?

Chief Prophet:

It is upon your pride that the doom will fall, and will

take away your crown and will take away your kingdom.

King:

I will sacrifice my crown and reign uncrowned among
you, so only I save my kingdom.

Chief Prophet:

If you sacrifice your crown which is your pride, and if
the stars accept it, perhaps the god that they went may
avert the doom and you may still reign in your kingdom
though humbled and uncrowned.

King:

Shall I burn my crown with spices and with incense or
cast it into the sea?

Chief Prophet:

Let it be laid here by the iron door where the god came
who wrote the golden doom. When he comes again by
night to shrivel up the city or to pour an enemy in
through the iron door, he will see your cast-off pride
and perhaps accept it and take it away to the neglected
stars.

King: {to the Chamberlain}

Go after my spies and say that I make no sacrifice.

{Exit the Chamberlain; the King takes off his crown}

Good-bye, my brittle glory; kings have sought you, the
stars have envied you. {The stage grows darker}

Chief Prophet:

Even now the sun has set who denies the stars, and the
day is departed wherein no gods walk abroad. It is
near the hour when spirits roam the earth and all
things that go unseen, and the faces of the abiding
stars will be soon revealed to the fields. Lay your
crown there and let us come away.

The Sentries: {kneeling}

Yes, Majesty.

{They remain kneeling until after the King has gone.

King and the Chief Prophet walk away.}

Chief Prophet:

It was your pride. Let it be forgotten. May the stars
accept it. {Exeunt left}

{The Sentries rise}

First Sentry:

The stars have envied him!

Second Sentry:

It is an ancient crown. He wore it well.

First Sentry:

May the stars accept it.

Second Sentry:

If they do not accept it what doom will overtake us?

First Sentry:

It will suddenly be as though there were never any city
of Zericon nor two sentries like you and me standing
before the door.

Second Sentry:

Why! How do you know?

First Sentry:

That is ever the way of the gods.

Second Sentry:

But it is unjust.

First Sentry:

How should the gods know that?

Second Sentry:

Will it happen to-night?

First Sentry:

Come! we must march away. {Exeunt right}

{The stage grows increasingly darker. Reenter the Chamberlain from the right. He walks across the Stage and goes out to the left. Reenter Spies from the right. They cross the stage, which is now nearly dark.}

Boy: {enters from the right, dressed in white, his hands out a little, crying} King's door, King's door, I want my little hoop. {He goes up to the King's door. When he sees the King's crown there, he utters a satisfied} O-oh! {He takes it up, puts it on the ground, and, beating it before him with the sceptre, goes out by the way that he entered.}

{The great door opens; there is light within; a furtive Spy slips out and sees that the crown is gone. Another Spy slips out. Their crouching heads come close

together.}

First Spy: {hoarse whisper}

The gods have come!

{They run back through the door and the door is
closed. It opens again and the King and the
Chamberlain come through.}

King:

The stars are satisfied.

{Curtain}

King Argimenes and the
Unknown Warrior

Persons

King Argimenes \

Zarb, a slave born of slaves |

An Old Slave |- Slaves of King Darniak

A Young Slave |

Slaves /

King Darniak

The King's Overseer

A Prophet

The Idol-Guard

The Servant of the King's Dog

Queen Atharlia \

Queen Oxara |- Queens of King Darniak

Queen Cahafra |

Queen Thragolind /

Guards and Attendants

Time: A long time ago.

The First Act

{The dinner-hour on the slave fields of King Darniak. King Argimenes is sitting on the ground, bowed, ragged and dirty, gnawing a bone. He has uncouth hair and a dishevelled beard. A battered spade lies near him. Two or three slaves sit at back of stage eating raw cabbage-leaves. The tear-song, the chant of the low-born, rises at intervals, monotonous and mournful, coming from distant slave-fields.}

King Argimenes:

This is a good bone; there is juice in this bone.

Zarb:

I wish I were you, Argimenes.

King Argimenes:

I am not to be envied any longer. I have eaten up my
bone.

Zarb:

I wish I were you, because you have been a king.
Because men have prostrated themselves before your
feet. Because you have ridden a horse and worn a crown
and been called Majesty.

King Argimenes:

When I remember that I have been a king it is very
terrible.

Zarb:

But you are lucky to have such things in your memory as
you have. I have nothing in my memory -- Once I went
for a year without being flogged, and I remember my
cleverness in contriving it -- I have nothing else to
remember.

King Argimenes:

It is very terrible to have been a king.

Zarb:

But we have nothing who have no good memories in the
past. It is not easy for us to hope for the future
here.

King Argimenes:

Have you any god?

Zarb:

We may not have a god because he might make us brave
and we might kill our guards. He might make a miracle
and give us swords.

King Argimenes:

Ah, you have no hope, then.

Zarb:

I have a little hope. Hush, and I will tell you a
secret -- The King's great dog is ill and like to die.
They will throw him to us. We shall have beautiful
bones then.

King Argimenes:

Ah! Bones.

Zarb:

Yes. That is what **I** hope for. And have **you** no
other hope? Do you not hope that your nation will
arise some day and rescue you and cast off the king and
hang him by his thumbs from the palace gateway?

King Argimenes:

No. I have no other hope, for my god was cast down in the temple and broken into three pieces on the day that they surprised us and took me sleeping. But will they throw him to us? Will so honorable a brute as the King's dog be thrown to us?

Zarb:

When he is dead his honors are taken away. Even the King when he is dead is given to the worms. Then why should not his dog be thrown to us?

King Argimenes:

We are not worms!

Zarb:

You do not understand, Argimenes. The worms are little and free, while we are big and enslaved. I did not say we were worms, but we are **like** worms, and if they have the King when he is dead, why then --

King Argimenes:

Tell me more of the King's dog. Are there big bones on him?

Zarb:

Aye, he is a big dog -- a high, big black one.

King Argimenes:

You know him then?

Zarb:

Oh yes, I know him. I know him well. I was beaten once because of him, twenty-five strokes from the treble whips, two men beating me.

King Argimenes:

How did they beat you because of the King's dog?

Zarb:

They beat me because I spoke to him without making obeisance. He was coming dancing alone over the slave-fields and I spoke to him. He was a friendly great dog, and I spoke to him and patted his head, and did not make obeisance.

King Argimenes:

And they saw you do it?

Zarb:

Yes, the slave-guard saw me. They came and seized me

at once and bound my arms. The great dog wanted me to speak to him again, but I was hurried away.

King Argimenes:

You should have made obeisance.

Zarb:

The great dog seemed so friendly that I forgot he was the King's great dog.

King Argimenes:

But tell me more. Was it a hurt or a sickness?

Zarb:

They say that it is a sickness.

King Argimenes:

Ah, then he will grow thin if he does not die soon. If it had been a hurt! -- but we should not complain. I complain more often than you do because I had not learned to submit while I was yet young.

Zarb:

If your beautiful memories do not please you, you should hope more. I wish I had your memories. I

should not trouble to hope then. It is very hard to hope.

King Argimenes

There will be nothing more to hope for when we have eaten the King's dog.

Zarb:

Why, you might find gold in the earth while you were digging. Then you might bribe the commander of the guard to lend you his sword; we would all follow you if you had a sword. Then we might take the King and bind him and lay him on the ground and fasten his tongue outside his mouth with thorns and put honey on it and sprinkle honey near. Then the gray ants would come from one of their big mounds. My father found gold once when he was digging.

King Argimenes: {pointedly}

Did your father free himself?

Zarb:

No. Because the King's Overseer found him looking at the gold and killed him. But he would have freed himself if he could have bribed the guard.

{A Prophet walks across the stage attended by two
guards.}

Slaves:

He is going to the King. He is going to the King.

Zarb:

He is going to the King.

King Argimenes:

Going to prophesy good things to the King. It is easy
to prophesy good things to a king, and be rewarded when
the good things come. What else should come to a
king? A prophet! A prophet!

{A deep bell tolls slowly. King Argimenes and Zarb
pick up their spades at once, and the old slaves at the
back of the stage go down on their knees immediately
and grub in the soil with their hands. The white beard
of the oldest trails in the dirt as he works. King
Argimenes digs.}

King Argimenes:

What is the name of that song that we always sing? I
like the song.

Zarb:

It has no name. It is our song. There is no other
song.

King Argimenes:

Once there were other songs. Has this no name?

Zarb:

I think the soldiers have a name for it.

King Argimenes:

What do the soldiers call it?

Zarb:

The soldiers call it the tear-song, the chant of the
low-born.

King Argimenes:

It is a good song. I could sing no other now.

{Zarb moves away digging.}

King Argimenes: {to himself as his spade touches something
in the earth}

Metal! {Feels with his spade again.} Gold perhaps!

-- It is of no use here. {Uncovers earth leisurely.
Suddenly he drops on his knees and works excitedly in
the earth with his hands. Then very slowly, still
kneeling, he lifts, lying flat on his hands, a long
greenish sword, his eyes intent on it. About the level
of his uplifted forehead he holds it, still flat on
both hands, and addresses it thus:} O holy and blessed
thing! {Then he lowers it slowly till his hands rest
on his knees, and looking all the while at the sword,
loquitur.} Three years ago to-morrow King Darniak spat
at me, having taken my kingdom from me. Three times in
that year I was flogged, with twelve stripes, with
seventeen stripes, and with twenty stripes. A year and
eleven months ago, come Moon-day, the King's Overseer
struck me in the face, and nine times in that year he
called me dog. For one month two weeks and a day I was
yoked with a bullock and pulled a rounded stone all day
over the paths, except while we were fed. I was
flogged twice that year -- with eighteen stripes and
with ten stripes. This year the roof of the slave-sty
has fallen in and King Darniak will not repair it.
Five weeks ago one of his Queens laughed at me as she
came across the slave-fields. I was flogged again this
year and with thirteen stripes, and twelve times they
have called me dog. And these things have they done to

a king, and a king of the house of Ithara. {He listens attentively for a moment, then buries the sword again and pats the earth over it with his hands, then digs again.}

{The old slaves do not see him: their faces are to the earth. Enter the King's Overseer carrying a whip. The slaves and King Argimenes kneel with their foreheads to the ground as he passes across the stage. Exit the King's Overseer.}

King Argimenes: {kneeling, hands outspread downward}

O warrior spirit, wherever thou wanderest, whoever be thy gods, whether they punish thee or whether they bless thee, O kingly spirit, that once laid here this sword, behold, I pray to thee, having no gods to pray to, for the god of my nation was broken in three by night. Mine arm is stiff with three years' slavery, and remembers not the sword. But guide thy sword till I have slain six men and armed the strongest slaves, and thou shalt have the sacrifice every year of a hundred goodly oxen. And I will build in Ithara a temple to thy memory wherein all that enter in shall remember thee; so shalt thou be honored and envied among the dead, for the dead are very jealous of remembrance. Ay, though thou wert a robber that took

men's lives unrighteously, yet shall rare spices
smoulder in thy temple and little maidens sing and
new-plucked flowers deck the solemn aisles; and priests
shall go about it ringing bells that thy soul shall
find repose. Oh, but it has a good blade, this old
green sword; thou wouldst not like to see it miss its
mark (if the dead see at all, as wise men teach), thou
wouldst not like to see it go thirsting into the air;
so huge a sword should find its marrowy bone.

{Extending his right hand upward} Come into my right
arm, O ancient spirit, O unknown warrior's soul! And
if thou hast the ear of any gods, speak there against
Illuriel, god of King Darniak. {He rises and goes on
digging.}

The King's Overseer: {reentering}

So you have been praying.

King Argimenes: {kneeling}

No, master.

The King's Overseer:

The slave-guard saw you. {Strikes him} It is not
lawful for a slave to pray.

King Argimenes:

I did but pray to Illuriel to make me a good slave, to
teach me to dig well and pull the rounded stone and to
make me not to die when the food is scarce, but to be a
good slave to my master the great King.

The King's Overseer:

Who art thou to pray to Illuriel? Dogs may not pray to
an immortal god. {Exit}

{Zarb comes back, digging}

King Argimenes: {digging}

Zarb!

Zarb: {also digging}

Do not look at me when you speak. The guards are
watching us. Look at your digging.

King Argimenes:

How do the guards know we are speaking because we look
at one another?

Zarb:

You are very witless. Of course they know.

King Argimenes:

Zarb!

Zarb:

What is it?

King Argimenes:

How many guards are there in sight?

Zarb:

There are six of them over there. They are watching
us.

King Argimenes:

Are there other guards in sight of these six guards?

Zarb:

No.

King Argimenes:

How do you know?

Zarb:

Because whenever their officer leaves them they sit
upon the ground and play with dice.

King Argimenes:

How does that show that there are not another six in sight of them?

Zarb:

How witless you are, Argimenes! Of course it shows there are not. Because, if there were, another officer would see them, and their thumbs would be cut off.

King Argimenes:

Ah! {A pause} Zarb! {A pause} Would the slaves follow me if I tried to kill the guards?

Zarb:

No, Argimenes.

King Argimenes:

Why would they not follow me?

Zarb:

Because you look like a slave. They will never follow a slave, because they are slaves themselves, and know how mean a creature is a slave. If you looked like a king they would follow you.

King Argimenes:

But I am a king. They know that I am a king.

Zarb:

It is better to look like a king. It is looks that
they would go by.

King Argimenes:

If I had a sword would they follow me? A beautiful
huge sword of bronze.

Zarb:

I wish I could think of things like that. It is
because you were once a king that you can think of a
sword of bronze. I tried to hope once that I should
some day fight the guards, but I could n't picture a
sword, I could n't imagine it; I could only picture
whips.

King Argimenes:

Dig a little nearer, Zarb. {They both edge closer} I
have found a very old sword in the earth. It is not a
sword such as common soldiers wear. A king must have
worn it, and an angry king. It must have done fearful
things; there are little dints in it. Perhaps there

was a battle here long ago where all were slain, and perhaps that king died last and buried his sword, but the great birds swallowed him.

Zarb:

You have been thinking too much of the King's dog, Argimenes, and that has made you hungry, and hunger has driven you mad.

King Argimenes:

I **have** found such a sword. {A pause}

Zarb:

Why -- then you will wear a purple cloak again, and sit on a great throne, and ride a prancing horse, and we shall call you Majesty.

King Argimenes:

I shall break a long fast first and drink much water, and sleep. But will the slaves follow me?

Zarb:

You will **make** them follow you if you have a sword. Yet is Illuriel a very potent god. They say that none have prevailed against King Darniak's dynasty so long as Illuriel stood. Once an enemy cast Illuriel into

the river and overthrew the dynasty, but a fisherman found him again and set him up, and the enemy was driven out and the dynasty returned.

King Argimenes:

If Illuriel could be cast down as my god was cast down perhaps King Darniak could be overcome as I was overcome in my sleep?

Zarb:

If Illuriel were cast down all the people would utter a cry and flee away. It would be a fearful portent.

King Argimenes:

How many men are there in the armory at the palace?

Zarb:

There are ten men in the palace armory when all the slave-guards are out.

{They dig awhile in silence.}

Zarb:

The officer of the slave-guard has gone away -- They are playing with dice now. {He throws down his spade

and stretches his arms.} The man with the big beard
has won again, he is very nimble with his thumbs --
They are playing again, but it is getting dark, I
cannot clearly see.

{King Argimenes furtively uncovers the sword, he picks
it up and grips it in his hand.}

Zarb:

Majesty!

{King Argimenes crouches and steals away towards the
slave-guard.}

.

Zarb: {to the other slaves}

Argimenes has found a terrible sword and has gone to
slay the slave-guard. It is not a common sword, it is
some king's sword.

An Old Slave:

Argimenes will be dreadfully flogged. We shall hear
him cry all night. His cries will frighten us, and we
shall not sleep.

Zarb:

No, no! The guards flog poor slaves, but Argimenes had an angry look. The guards will be afraid when they see him look so angry and see his terrible sword. It was a huge sword, and he looked very angry. He will bring us the swords of the slave-guard. We must prostrate ourselves before him and kiss his feet or he will be angry with us too.

Old Slave:

Will Argimenes give me a sword?

Zarb:

He will have swords for six of us if he slays the slave-guard. Yes, he will give you a sword.

Slave:

A sword! No, no, I must not; the King would kill me if he found that I had a sword.

Second slave: {slowly, as one who develops an idea}

If the King found that I had a sword, why, then it would be an evil day for the King.

{They all look off left.}

Zarb:

I think that they are playing at dice again.

First Slave:

I do not see Argimenes.

Zarb:

No, because he was crouching as he walked. The
slave-guard is on the sky-line.

Second slave:

What is that dark shadow behind the slave-guard?

Zarb:

It is too still to be Argimenes.

Second slave:

Look! It moves.

Zarb:

The evening is too dark, I cannot see.

{They continue to gaze into the gathering darkness.

They raise themselves on their knees and crane their
necks. Nobody speaks. Then from their lips and from

others farther off goes up a long, deep "Oh!" It is like the sound that goes up from the grandstand when a horse falls at a fence, or, in England, like the first exclamation of the crowd at a great cricket match when a man is caught in the slips.}

{Curtain}

The Second Act

{The Throne Hall of King Darniak. The King is seated on his throne in the centre at the back of the stage; a little to his left, but standing out from the wall, a dark-green seated idol is set up. His Queens are seated about him on the ground, two on his right and two between him and the idol. All wear crowns. Beside the dark-green idol a soldier with a pike is kneeling upon one knee. The tear-song, the chant of the low-born, drifts faintly up from the slave-fields.}

First Queen:

Do show us the new prophet, Majesty; it would be very

interesting to see another prophet.

The King:

Ah, yes.

{He strikes upon a gong, and an Attendant enters, walks straight past the King and bows before the idol; he then walks back to the centre of the stage and bows before the King.}

The King:

Bring the new prophet hither.

{Exit Attendant. Enter the King's Overseer holding a roll of paper. He passes the King, bows to the idol, returns to the front of the King, kneels, and remains kneeling with bended head.}

The King: {speaking in the meanwhile to the Second Queen on his immediate right}

We are making a beautiful arbor for you, O Atharlia, at an end of the great garden. There shall be iris-flowers that you love and all things that grow by streams. And the stream there shall be small and winding like one of those in your country. I shall bring a stream a new way from the mountains. {Turning

to Queen Oxara on his extreme right} And for you, too,
O Oxara, we shall make a pleasance. I shall have rocks
brought from the quarries for you, and my idle slaves
shall make a hill and plant it with mountain shrubs,
and you can sit there in the winter thinking of the
North. {To the kneeling Overseer} Ah, what is here?

The King's Overseer:

The plans of your royal garden, Majesty. The slaves
have dug it for five years and rolled the paths.

The King: {takes the plans}

Was there not a garden in Babylon?

The King's Overseer:

They say there was a garden there of some sort,
Majesty.

The King:

I shall have a greater garden. Let the world know and
wonder. {Looks at the plans.}

The King's Overseer:

It shall know at once, Majesty.

The King: {pointing at the plan}

I do not like that hill, it is too steep.

The King's Overseer:

No, Majesty.

The King:

Remove it.

The King's Overseer:

Yes, Majesty.

The King:

When will the garden be ready for the Queens to walk
in?

The King's Overseer:

Work is slow, Majesty, at this season of the year
because the green stuff is scarce and the slaves grow
idle. They even become insolent and ask for bones.

Queen Cahafra: {to the King's Overseer}

They **why** are they not flogged? {To Queen
Thragolind} It is so simple, they have **only** to flog
them, but these people are so silly sometimes. I want
to walk in the great garden, and then they tell me: "It

is not ready, Majesty. It is not ready, Majesty," as though there were any reason why it should *not* be ready.

Fourth Queen:

Yes, they are a great trouble to us.

{Meanwhile the King hands back the plans. Exit the King's Overseer. Reenter Attendant with the Prophet, who is dressed in a long dark brown cloak; his face is solemn; he has a long dark beard and long hair. Having bowed before the idol, he bows before the King and stands silent. The attendant, having bowed to both, stands by the doorway.}

The King: {meanwhile to Queen Atharlia}

Perhaps we shall lure the ducks when the marches are frozen to come and swim in your stream; it will be like your own country. {To the Prophet} Prophecy unto us.

The Prophet: {speaks at once in a loud voice}

There was once a King that had slaves to hate him and to toil for him, and he had soldiers to guard him and to die for him. And the number of the slaves that he had to hate him and to toil for him was greater than

the number of the soldiers that he had to guard him and
to die for him. And the days of that King were few.
And the number of thy slaves, O King, that thou has to
hate thee is greater than the number of thy soldiers.

Queen Cahafra: {to Queen Thragolind}

-- and I wore the crown with the sapphires and the big
emerald in it, and the foreign prince said that I
looked very sweet.

{The King, who has been smiling at Queen Atharlia,
gives a gracious nod to the Prophet when he hears him
stop speaking. When the Queens see the King nod
graciously, they applaud the Prophet by idly clapping
their hands.}

Third Queen:

Do ask him to make us another prophecy, Majesty! He is
so interesting. He looks so clever.

The King:

Prophecy unto us.

The Prophet:

Thine armies camped upon thy mountainous borders descry
no enemy in the plains afar. And within thy gates

lurks he for whom thy sentinels seek upon lonely
guarded frontiers. There is a fear upon me and a
boding. Even yet there is time, even yet; but *little*
time. And my mind is dark with trouble for thy
kingdom.

Queen Cahafra: {to Queen Thragolind}

I do not like the way he does his hair.

Queen Thragolind:

It would be all right if he would only have it cut.

The King: {to the Prophet, dismissing him with a nod of the
head}

Thank you, that has been very interesting.

Queen Thragolind:

How clever he is! I wonder how he thinks of things
like that?

Queen Cahafra:

Yes, but I hate a man who is conceited about it. Look
how he wears his hair.

Queen Thragolind:

Yes, of course it is perfectly dreadful.

Queen Cahafra:

Why can't he wear his hair like other people, even if
he does say clever things?

Queen Thragolind:

Yes, I hate a conceited man. {It is not necessary for
the Prophet's hair to be at all unusual.}

{Enter an Attendant. He bows before the idol, then
kneels to the King.}

The Attendant:

The guests are all assembled in the Chamber of
Banquets.

{All rise. The Queens walk two abreast to the Chamber
of Banquets.}

Queen Atharlia: {to Queen Oxara}

What was he talking about?

Queen Oxara:

He was talking about armies on the frontier.

Queen Atharlia:

Ah! That reminds me of that young captain in the Purple guard. They say that he loves Linoora.

Queen Oxara:

Oh, Thearkos! Linoora probably said that.

{When the Queens come to the doorway they halt on each side of it. Then they turn facing one another. Then the King leaves his throne and passes between them into the Chamber of Banquets, each couple curtsying low to him as he passes. The Queens follow, then the attendants. There rises the wine-song, the chant of the nobles, drowning the chant of the low-born. Only the Idol-Guard remains behind, still kneeling beside Illuriel.}

The Idol-Guard:

I do not like those things the Prophet said -- It would be terrible if they were true -- It would be very terrible if they were false, for he prophesies in the name of Illuriel -- Ah! They are singing the wine-song, the chant of the nobles. The Queens are singing. How merry they are! -- I should like to be a noble and sit and look at the Queens. {He joins in the

song.}

The Voice of a Sentinel:

Guard, turn out. {The wine-song still continues.}

The Voice of One Having Authority:

Turn out the guard there! Wake up, you accursed pigs!

{Still the wine-song. A faint sound as of swords.}

A Voice Crying:

To the armory! To the armory! Reinforce! The Slaves
have come to the armory. Ah! mercy! {For awhile there
is silence.}

King Argimenes: {in the doorway}

Go you to the slave-fields. Say that the palace-guard
is dead and that we have taken the armory. Ten of you,
hold the armory till our men come from the
slave-fields. {He comes into the hall with his slaves
armed with swords.} Throw down Illuriel.

The Idol-Guard:

You must take my life before you touch my god.

A Slave:

We only want your pike.

{All attack him; they seize his sword and bind his hands behind him. They all pull down Illuriel, the dark-green idol, who breaks into seven pieces.}

King Argimenes:

Illuriel is fallen and broken asunder.

Zarb: {with some awe}

Immortal Illuriel is dead at last.

King Argimenes:

My god was broken into three pieces, but Illuriel is broken into seven. The fortunes of Darniak will prevail over mine no longer. {A slave breaks off a golden arm from the throne} Come, we will arm all the slaves. {Exeunt}

King Darniak: {enters with Retinue}

My throne is broken. Illuriel is turned against me.

An Attendant:

Illuriel is fallen.

All: {with King Darniak}

Illuriel is fallen, is fallen. {Some drop their
spears}

King Darniak: {to the Idol-Guard}

What envious god or sacrilegious man has dared to do
this thing?

The Idol-Guard:

Illuriel is fallen.

King Darniak:

Have men been here?

The Idol-Guard:

Is fallen.

King Darniak:

What way did they go?

The Idol-Guard:

Illuriel is fallen.

King Darniak:

They shall be tortured here before Illuriel, and their
eyes shall be hung upon a thread about his neck, so

that Illuriel shall see it, and on their bones we will
set him up again. Come!

{Those that have dropped their spears pick them up, but
trail them along behind them on the ground. All follow
dejectedly.}

Voice of Lamentation: {growing fainter and fainter off}

Illuriel is fallen. Illuriel is fallen. Illuriel,
Illuriel, Illuriel. Is fallen. Is fallen. {The song
of the low-born ceases suddenly. Then voices of the
slaves in the slave-fields chanting very loudly.}
Illuriel is fallen, is fallen, is fallen. Illuriel is
fallen and broken asunder. Illuriel is fallen, fallen,
fallen.

{Clamor of fighting is heard, the clash of swords, and
voices, and now and then the name of Illuriel.}

Idol-Guard: {kneeling over a fragment of Illuriel}

Illuriel is broken. They have overthrown Illuriel.
They have done great harm to the courses of the stars.
The moon will be turned to blackness or fall and
forsake the nights. The sun will rise no more. They
do not know how they have wrecked the world.

{Reenter King Argimenes and his men.}

King Argimenes:

Go you to the land of Ithara and tell them that I am free. And do you go to the army on the frontier. Offer them death, or the right arm of the throne to be melted and divided amongst them all. Let them choose. {The armed slaves go to the throne and stand on each side of it, loquitur} Majesty, ascend your throne. {King Argimenes, standing with his face toward the audience, lifts the sword slowly, lying on both his hands, a little above his head, then looking up at it, loquitur} Praise to the unknown warrior and to all gods that bless him. {He ascends the throne. Zarb prostrates himself at the foot of it and remains prostrated for the rest of the Act, muttering at intervals "Majesty." An armed slave enters dragging the King's Overseer. King Argimenes sternly watches him. He is dragged before the throne. He still has the roll of parchment in his hand. For some moments King Argimenes does not speak. Then pointing at the parchment} What have you there?

The King's Overseer: {kneeling}

It is a plan of the great garden, Majesty. It was to

have been a wonder to the world. {Unfolds it}

King Argimenes: {grimly}

Show me the place that I digged for three years. {The King's Overseer shows it with trembling hands; the parchment shakes visibly} Let there be built there a temple to an Unknown Warrior. And let this sword be laid on its altar evermore, that the ghost of that Warrior wandering by night (if men do walk by night from across the grave) may see his sword again. And let slaves be allowed to pray there and those that are oppressed; nevertheless the noble and the mighty shall not fail to repair there too, that the Unknown Warrior shall not lack due reverence.

{Enter, running, a Man of the household of King Darniak. He starts and stares aghast on seeing King Argimenes.}

King Argimenes:

Who are you?

Man:

I am the servant of the King's dog.

King Argimenes:

Why do you come here?

Man:

The King's dog is dead.

King Argimenes and his men: {savagely and hungrily}

Bones!

King Argimenes: {remembering suddenly what has happened and
where he is}

Let him be buried with the late King.

Zarb: {in a voice of protest}

Majesty!

{Curtain}

The Glittering Gate

Persons

Jim, lately a burglar _ Both dead

Bill, " " " /

Scene: A Lonely Place.

Time: The present.

{The Lonely Place is strewn with large black rocks and uncorked beer-bottles, the latter in great profusion. At back is a wall of granite built of great slabs, and in it the Gate of Heaven. The door is of gold.

Below the Lonely Place is an abyss hung with stars.

The rising curtain reveals Jim wearily uncorking a beer-bottle. Then he tilts it slowly and with infinite care. It proves to be empty. Faint and unpleasant laughter is heard off. This action and accompanying far laughter are

repeated continually throughout the play. Corked bottles are discovered lying behind rocks, and more descend constantly through the air, within reach of Jim. All prove to be empty.

Jim uncorks a few bottles.}

Jim: {weighing one carefully}

That's a full one. {It is empty, like all}

{Singing is heard off left.}

Bill: {enters from left with a bullet-hole over his eye, singing} Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves.
{Breaking off his song} Why, 'ullo. 'Ere's a bottle of beer. {Finds it empty; looking off and downward}
I'm getting a bit tired of those blooming great stars down there and this rocky ledge. I've been walking along under this wall ever since. Why, it must be twenty-four hours since that householder shot me. And he need n't have done it, either, *I* was n't going to hurt the bloke. I only wanted a bit of his silver stuff. It felt funny, that did. Hullo, a gate. Why, that's the Gate of Heaven. Well, well. So that's all right. {Looks up and up for some time} No. I can't climb *that* wall. Why, it's got no top to it. Up and up it goes. {Knocks at the door and waits}

Jim:

That is n't for the likes of us.

Bill:

Why, hullo, there's another bloke. Why, somebody's
been hanging him. Why, if it is n't old Jim! Jim!

Jim: {wearily}

Hullo.

Bill:

Why, Jim! 'Ow long 'ave you been here?

Jim:

I *am* here always.

Bill:

Why, Jim, don't you remember me? Why, you taught Bill
to pick locks years and years ago when he was a little
boy, and had never learnt a trade and had n't a penny
in the world, and never would have had but for you,
Jim. {Jim stares vaguely} I never forgot *you*, Jim.
I broke into scores of houses. And then I took on big
houses. Out in the country, you know, real big ones.

I got rich, Jim, and respected by all who knew me. I was a citizen, Jim, one who dwelt in our midst. And of an evening, sitting over the fire, I used to say, "I am as clever as Jim." But I was n't, Jim. I could n't climb like you. And I could n't walk like you on a creaky stair, when everything's quite still and there's a dog in the house and little rattly things left lying about, and a door that whines if you touch it, and someone ill upstairs that you did n't know of, who has nothing to do but listen for *you* 'cause she can't get to sleep. Don't you remember little Bill?

Jim:

That would be somewhere else.

Bill:

Yes, Jim, yes. Down on Earth.

Jim:

But there is n't anywhere else.

Bill:

I never forgot you, Jim. I'd be pattering away with my tongue, in Church, like all the rest, but all the time I'd be thinking of you in that little room at Putney and the man searching every corner of it for you with a

revolver in one hand and a candle in the other, and you almost going round with him.

Jim:

What is Putney?

Bill:

Oh, Jim, can't you remember? Can't you remember the day you taught me a livelihood? I was n't more than twelve, and it was spring, and all the may was in blossom outside the town. And we cleared out No. 25 in the new street. And the next day we saw the man's fat, silly face. It was thirty years ago.

Jim:

What are years?

Bill:

Oh, *Jim!*

Jim:

You see there is n't any hope here. And when there isn't any hope there is n't any future. And when there is n't any future there is n't any past. It's just the present here. I tell you we're stuck. There are n't

no years here. Nor no nothing.

Bill:

Cheer up, Jim. You're thinking of a quotation,
"Abandon hope, all ye that enter here." I used to
learn quotations; they are awfully genteel. A fellow
named Shakespeare used to make them. But there is n't
any sense in them. What's the use of saying "ye" when
you mean "you"? Don't be thinking of quotations, Jim.

Jim:

I tell you there is no hope here.

Bill:

Cheer up, Jim. There's plenty of hope there, is n't
there? {Points to the Gate of Heaven}

Jim:

Yes, and that's why they keep it locked up so. They
won't let us have any. No. I begin to remember Earth
again now since you've been speaking. It was just the
same there. The more they'd got the more they wanted
to keep *you* from having a bit.

Bill:

You'll cheer up a bit when I tell you what I've got. I

say, Jim, have you got some beer? Why, so you have.

Why, *you* ought to cheer up, Jim.

Jim:

All the beer you're ever likely to see again. They're empty.

Bill: {half rising from the rock on which he has seated himself, and pointing his finger at Jim as he rises; very cheerfully} Why, you're the chap that said there was no hope here, and you're hoping to find beer in every bottle you open.

Jim:

Yes; I *hope* to see a drop of beer in one some day, but I *know* I won't. Their trick *might* not work just once.

Bill:

How many have you tried, Jim?

Jim:

Oh, I don't know. I've always been at it, working as fast as I can, ever since -- ever since -- {Feels his neck meditatively and up toward his ear} Why, ever

since, Bill.

Bill:

Why don't you stop it?

Jim:

I'm too thirsty, Bill.

Bill:

What do you think **I've** got, Jim?

Jim:

I don't know. Nothing's any use.

Bill: {as yet another bottle is shown to be empty}

Who's that laughing, Jim?

Jim: {astonished at such a question, loudly and

emphatically} Who's that laughing?

Bill: {looks a little disconcerted at having apparently

asked a silly question} Is it a pal?

Jim:

A pal! -- {laughs} {The laugh off joins in loudly and
for long}

Bill:

Well, I don't know. But, Jim, what do you think I've got?

Jim:

It isn't any use to you whatever it is. Not even if it's a ten-pound note.

Bill:

It's better than a ten-pound note, Jim. Jim, try and remember, Jim. Don't you remember the way we used to go for these iron safes? Do you remember anything, Jim?

Jim:

Yes, I am beginning to remember now. There used to be sunsets. And then there were great yellow lights. And one went in behind them through a swinging door.

Bill:

Yes, yes, Jim. That was the Blue Bear down at Wimbledon.

Jim:

Yes, and the room was all full of golden light. And there was beer with light in it, and some would be spilt on the counter and there was light in that too. And there was a girl standing there with yellow hair. She'd be the other side of that door now, with lamplight in her hair among the angels, and the old smile on her lips if one of them chaffed her, and her pretty teeth a-shining. She would be very near the throne; there was never any harm in Jane.

Bill:

No, there was never any 'arm in Jane, Jim.

Jim:

Oh, I don't want to see the angels, Bill. But if I could see Jane again {points in direction of laugh} he might laugh as much as he cared to whenever I wanted to cry. You can't cry here, you know, Bill.

Bill:

You shall see her again, Jim.

{Jim takes no interest in this remark; he lowers his eyes and goes on with his work.}

Bill:

Jim, you shall see her again. You want to get into
Heaven, don't you?

Jim: {not raising his eyes}

Want!

Bill:

Jim. Do you know what I've got, Jim?

{Jim makes no answer, goes on wearily with his work.}

Bill:

You remember those iron safes, Jim, how we used to
knock them open like walnuts with "Old Nut-cracker"?

Jim: {at work, wearily}

Empty again.

Bill:

Well, I've got Old Nut-cracker. I had him in my hand
at the time, and they let me keep him. They thought it
would be a nice proof against me.

Jim:

Nothing is any good here.

Bill:

I'll get in to Heaven, Jim. And you shall come with me because you taught me a livelihood. I could n't be happy there, like those angels, if I knew of anyone being outside. I'm not like that.

{Jim goes on with his work.}

Bill:

Jim, Jim. You'll see Jane there.

Jim:

You'll never get through those gates, Bill. You'll never do it.

Bill:

They're only gold, Jim. Gold's soft like lead. Old Nut-cracker would do it if they were steel.

Jim:

You'll never do it, Bill.

{Bill puts a rock against the gates, stands on it to reach the lock and gets to work on the lock. A good instrument to use is an egg-whipper. Jim goes on

wearily with his work. As Bill works away, fragments
and golden screws begin to fall on the floor.}

Bill:

Jim! Old Nut-cracker thinks nothing of it. It's just
like cheese to Old Nut-cracker.

Jim:

They won't let you do it, Bill.

Bill:

They don't know what I've got. I'm getting through it
like cheese, Jim.

Jim:

Suppose it's a mile thick. Suppose it's a million
miles thick. Suppose it's a hundred million miles
thick.

Bill:

Can't be, Jim. Those doors are meant to open outward.
They could n't do that if they were more than four
inches thick at the most, not for an Archbishop.
They'd stick.

Jim:

You remember that great safe we broke open once, what had coal in it.

Bill:

This is n't a safe, Jim, this is Heaven. There'll be the old saints with their halos shining and flickering, like windows o' wintry nights. {Creak, creak, creak} And angels thick as swallows along a cottage roof the day before they go. {Creak, creak, creak} And orchards full of apples as far as you can see, and the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, so the Bible says; and a city of gold, for those that care for cities, all full of precious stones; but I'm a bit tired of cities and precious stones. {Creak, creak, creak} I'll go out into the fields where the orchards are, by the Tigris and Euphrates. I should n't be surprised if my old mother was there. She never cared much for the way I earned my livelihood {creak, creak}, but she was a good mother to me. I don't know if they want a good mother in there who would be kind to the angels and sit and smile at them when they sang and soothe them if they were cross. If they let all the good ones in she'll be there all right. {Suddenly} Jim! They won't have brought me up against her, will they? That's not fair evidence, Jim.

Jim:

It would be just like them to. Very like them.

Bill:

If there's a glass of beer to be got in Heaven, or a dish of tripe and onions, or a pipe of 'bacca she'll have them for me when I come to her. She used to know my ways wonderful; and what I liked. And she used to know when to expect me almost anywhere. I used to climb in through the window at any hour and she always knew it was me. {Creak, creak} She'll know it's me at the door now, Jim. {Creak, creak} It will be all a blaze of light, and I'll hardly know it's her till I get used to it... But I'll know her among a million angels. There were n't none like her on Earth and there won't be none like her in Heaven... Jim! I'm through, Jim! One more turn, and Old Nut-cracker's done it! It's giving! It's giving! I know the feel of it. *Jim*!

{At last there is a noise of falling bolts; the gates swing out an inch and are stopped by the rock.}

Bill:

Jim! Jim! I've opened it, Jim. I've opened the Gate
of Heaven! Come and help me.

Jim: {looks up for a moment with open mouth. Then he
mournfully shakes his head and goes on drawing a cork}
Another one empty.

Bill: {looks down once into the abyss that lies below the
Lonely Place} Stars. Blooming great stars.

{Then he moves away the rock on which he stood. The
gates move slowly. Jim leaps up and runs to help; they
each take a gate and move backward with their faces
against it.}

Bill:

Hullo, mother! You there? Hullo! You there? It's
Bill, mother.

{The gates swing heavily open, revealing empty night
and stars.}

Bill: {staggering and gazing into the revealed Nothing, in
which far stars go wandering} Stars. Blooming great
stars. There **ain't** no Heaven, Jim.

{Ever since the revelation a cruel and violent laugh
has arisen off. It increases in volume and grows
louder and louder.}

Jim:

That's like them. That's very like them. Yes, they'd
do that!

{The curtain falls and the laughter still howls on.}

The Lost Silk Hat

Persons

The Caller

The Laborer

The Clerk

The Poet

The Policeman

Scene: A fashionable London street.

{The Caller stands on a doorstep, "faultlessly dressed," but without a hat. At first he shows despair, then a new thought engrosses him.

Enter the Laborer.}

The Caller:

Excuse me a moment. Excuse me -- but -- I'd be greatly obliged to you if -- if you could see your way -- in fact, you can be of great service to me if --

The Laborer:

Glad to do what I can, sir.

Caller:

Well, all I really want you to do is just to ring that bell and go up and say -- er -- say that you've come to

see to the drains, or anything like that, you know, and
get hold of my hat for me.

Laborer:

Get hold of your 'at!

Caller:

Yes. You see, I left my hat behind most
unfortunately. It's in the drawing-room {points to
window}, that room there, half under the long sofa, the
far end from the door. And if you could possibly go
and get it, why I'd be {The Laborer's expression
changes} -- Why, what's the matter?

Laborer: {firmly}

I don't like this job.

Caller:

Don't like this job! But, my dear fellow, don't be
silly, what possible harm -- ?

Laborer:

Ah-h. That's what I don't know.

Caller:

But what harm can there possibly be in so simple a request? What harm does there seem to be?

Laborer:

Oh, it seems all right.

Caller:

Well, then.

Laborer:

All these crack jobs do seem all right.

Caller:

But I'm not asking you to rob the house.

Laborer:

Don't seem as if you are, certainly, but I don't like the looks of it; what if there's things what I can't 'elp taking when I gets inside?

Caller:

I only want my hat -- Here, I say, please don't go away -- here's a sovereign, it will only take you a minute.

Laborer:

What I want to know --

Caller:

Yes?

Laborer:

-- Is what's *in* that hat?

Caller:

What's *in* the hat?

Laborer:

Yes; that's what I want to know.

Caller:

What's *in* the hat?

Laborer:

Yes, you are n't going to give me a sovereign -- ?

Caller:

I'll give you two sovereigns.

Laborer:

You are n't going to give me a sovereign, and rise it
to two sovereigns, for an *empty* hat?

Caller:

But I must have my hat. I can't be seen in the streets like this. There's nothing **in** the hat. What do you think's in the hat?

Laborer:

Ah, I'm not clever enough to say that, but it looks as if the papers was in that hat.

Caller:

The papers?

Laborer:

Yes, papers proving, if you can get them, that you're the heir to that big house, and some poor innocent will be defrauded.

Caller:

Look here, the hat's absolutely empty. I **must** have my hat. If there's anything in it you shall have it yourself as well as the two pounds, only get me my hat.

Laborer:

Well, that seems all right.

Caller:

That's right, then you'll run up and get it?

Laborer:

Seems all right to me and seems all right to you. But
it's the police what you and I have got to think of.

Will it seem all right to them?

Caller:

Oh, for heaven's sake --

Laborer:

Ah!

Caller:

What a hopeless fool you are.

Laborer:

Ah!

Caller:

Look here.

Laborer:

Ah, I got you there, mister.

Caller:

Look here, for goodness sake don't go.

Laborer:

Ah! {Exit}

{Enter the Clerk}

Caller:

Excuse me, sir. Excuse me asking you, but, as you see,
I am without a hat. I shall be extraordinarily obliged
to you if you would be so very good as to get it for
me. Pretend you have come to wind the clocks, you
know. I left it in the drawing-room of this house,
half under the long sofa, the far end.

Clerk:

Oh, er -- all right, only --

Caller:

Thanks so much, I am immensely indebted to you. Just
say you've come to wind the clocks, you know.

Caller:

I -- er -- don't think I'm very good at winding clocks,

you know.

Caller:

Oh, that's all right, just stand in front of the clock
and fool about with it. That's all they ever do. I
must warn you there's a lady in the room.

Clerk:

Oh!

Caller:

But that's all right, you know. Just walk past up to
the clock.

Clerk:

But I think, if you don't mind, as there's someone
there --

Caller:

Oh, but she's quite young and very, very beautiful
and --

Clerk:

Why don't you get it yourself?

Caller:

That is impossible.

Clerk:

Impossible?

Caller:

Yes, I have sprained my ankle.

Clerk:

Oh! Is it bad?

Caller:

Yes, very bad indeed.

Clerk:

I don't mind trying to carry you up.

Caller:

No, that would be worse. My foot has to be kept on the
ground.

Clerk:

But how will you get home?

Caller:

I can walk all right on the flat.

Clerk:

I'm afraid I have to be going on. It's rather later
than I thought.

Caller:

But for goodness sake don't leave me. You can't leave
me here like this without a hat.

Clerk:

I'm afraid I must, it's later than I thought.

{Exit}

{Enter the Poet}

Caller:

Excuse me, sir. Excuse my stopping you. But I should
be immensely obliged to you if you would do me a very
great favor. I have unfortunately left my hat behind
while calling at this house. It is half under the long
sofa, at the far end. If you could possibly be so kind
as to pretend you have come to tune the piano and fetch
my hat for me I should be enormously grateful to you.

Poet:

But why cannot you get it for yourself?

Caller:

I cannot.

Poet:

If you would tell me the reason perhaps I could help
you.

Caller:

I cannot. I can never enter that house again.

Poet:

If you have committed a murder, by all means tell me.
I am not sufficiently interested in ethics to wish to
have you hanged for it.

Caller:

Do I look like a murderer?

Poet:

No, of course not. I am only saying that you can
safely trust me, for not only does the statute book and
its penalties rather tend to bore me, and murder itself

has always had a certain fascination for me. I write delicate and fastidious lyrics, yet, strange as it may appear, I read every murder trial, and my sympathies are always with the prisoner.

Caller:

But I tell you I am not a murderer.

Poet:

Then what have you done?

Caller:

I have quarrelled with a lady in that house and have sworn to join the Bosnians and die in Africa.

Poet:

But this is beautiful.

Caller:

Unfortunately I forgot my hat.

Poet:

You go to die for a hopeless love, and in a far country; it was the wont of the troubadours.

Caller:

But will you get my hat for me?

Poet:

That I will gladly do for you. But we must find an adequate reason for entering the house.

Caller:

You pretend to tune the piano.

Poet:

That, unfortunately, is impossible. The sound of a piano being unskillfully handled is to me what the continual drop of cold water on the same part of the head is said to be in countries where that interesting torture is practiced. There is --

Caller:

But what are we to do?

Poet:

There is a house where kind friends of mine have given me that security and comfort that are a poet's necessity. But there was a governess there and a piano. It is years and years since I was able even to see the faces of those friends without an inward

shudder.

Caller:

Well, we'll have to think of something else.

Poet:

You are bringing back to these unhappy days the romance
of an age of which the ballads tell us that kings
sometimes fought in no other armor than their lady's
nightshirt.

Caller:

Yes, but you know first of all I must get my *hat*.

Poet:

But why?

Caller:

I cannot possibly be seen in the streets without a hat.

Poet:

Why not?

Caller:

It can't be done.

Poet:

But you confuse externals with essentials.

Caller:

I don't know what you call essentials, but being
decently dressed in London seems pretty essential to
me.

Poet:

A hat is not one of the essential things of life.

Caller:

I don't want to appear rude, but my hat is n't quite
like yours.

Poet:

Let us sit down and talk of things that matter, things
that will be remembered after a hundred years. {They
sit} Regarded in this light one sees at once the
triviality of hats. But to die, and die beautifully
for a hopeless love, that is a thing one could make a
lyric about. That is the test of essential things --
try and imagine them in a lyric. One could not write a
lyric about a hat.

Caller:

I don't care whether you could write a lyric about my hat or whether you could n't. All I know is that I am not going to make myself absolutely ridiculous by walking about in London without a hat. Will you get it for me or will you not?

Poet:

To take any part in the tuning of a piano is impossible for me.

Caller:

Well, pretend you've come to look at the radiator. They have one under the window, and I happen to know it leaks.

Poet:

I suppose it has an artistic decoration on it.

Caller:

Yes, I think so.

Poet:

Then I decline to look at it or go near it. I know these decorations in cast iron. I once saw a

pot-bellied Egyptian god, named Bes, and he was *meant*
to be ugly, but he was n't as ugly as these decorations
that the twentieth century can make with machinery.
What has a plumber got to do with art that he should
dare to attempt decoration?

Caller:

Then you won't help me.

Poet:

I won't look at ugly things and I won't listen to ugly
noises, but if you can think of any reasonable plan I
don't mind helping you.

Caller:

I can think of nothing else. You don't look like a
plumber or a clock-winder. I can think of nothing
more. I have had a terrible ordeal and I am not in the
condition to think calmly.

Poet:

Then you will have to leave your hat to its altered
destiny.

Caller:

Why can't you think of a plan? If you're a poet,

thinking's rather in your line.

Poet:

If I could bring my thoughts to contemplate so absurd a
thing as a hat for any length of time no doubt I could
think of a plan, but the very triviality of the theme
seems to drive them away.

Caller: {rising}

Then I must get it myself.

Poet:

For Heaven's sake, don't do that! Think what it means!

Caller:

I know it will seem absurd, but not so absurd as
walking through London without it.

Poet:

I don't mean that. But you will make it up. You will
forgive each other, and you will marry her and have a
family of noisy, pimply children like everyone else,
and Romance will be dead. No, don't ring that bell.
Go and buy a bayonet, or whatever one does buy, and
join the Bosnians.

Caller:

I tell you I can't without a hat.

Poet:

What is a hat? Will you sacrifice for it a beautiful
doom? Think of your bones, lying neglected and
forgotten, lying forlornly because of hopeless love on
endless golden sands. "Lying forlorn!" as Keats said.

What a word! Forlorn in Africa. The careless Bedouins
going past by day, at night the lion's roar, the
grievous voice of the desert.

Caller:

As a matter of fact, I don't think you're right in
speaking of it as desert. The Bosnians, I believe, are
only taking it because it is supposed to be the most
fertile land in the world.

Poet:

What of that? You will not be remembered by geography
and statistics, but by golden-mouthed Romance. And
that is how Romance sees Africa.

Caller:

Well, I'm going to get my hat.

Poet:

Think! Think! If you enter by that door you will
never fall among the foremost Bosnians. You will never
die in a far-off, lonely land to lie by immense
Sahara. And she will never weep for your beautiful
doom and call herself cruel in vain.

Caller:

Hark! She is playing the piano. It seems to me that
she might be unhappy about it for years. I don't see
much good in that.

Poet:

No. *I* will comfort her.

Caller:

I'm damned if you do! Look here! I don't mind saying,
I'm damned if you do.

Poet:

Calm yourself. Calm yourself. I do not mean in that
way.

Caller:

Then what on earth do you mean?

Poet:

I will make songs about your beautiful death, glad
songs and sad songs. They shall be glad because they
tell again the noble traditions of the troubadours, and
sad because they tell of your sorrowful destiny and
your hopeless love.

I shall make legends about your lonely bones, telling
perhaps how some Arabian men, finding them in the
desert by some oasis, memorable in war, wonder who
loved them. And then as I read them to her, she weeps
perhaps a little, and I read instead of the glory of
the soldier, how it overtops our transitory --

Caller:

Look here, I'm not aware that you've ever been
introduced to her.

Poet:

A trifle, a trifle.

Caller:

It seems to me that you're in rather an undue hurry for
me to get a Jubu spear in me; but I'm going to get my
hat first.

Poet:

I appeal to you. I appeal to you in the name of
beautiful battles, high deeds, and lost causes; in the
name of love-tales told to cruel maidens and told in
vain. In the name of stricken hearts broken like
beautiful harp-strings, I appeal to you.

I appeal in the ancient holy name of Romance; *do not
ring that bell.*

{Caller rings the bell.}

Poet: {sits down, abject}

You will marry. You will sometimes take a ticket with
your wife as far as Paris. Perhaps as far as Cannes.
Then the family will come; a large sprawling family as
far as the eye can see (I speak in hyperbole). You'll
earn money and feed it and be like all the rest. No
monument will ever be set up to your memory, but --

{Servant answers bell. Caller says something
inaudible. Exit through door.}

Poet: {rising, lifting hand}

But let there be graven in brass upon this house;

Romance was born again here out of due time and died
young. {He sits down}

{Enter Laborer and Clerk with Policeman. The music
stops.}

Policeman:

Anything wrong here?

Poet:

Everything's wrong. They're going to kill Romance.

Policeman: {to Laborer}

This gentleman does n't seem quite right somehow.

Laborer:

They're none of them quite right today.

{Music starts again}

Poet:

My God! It is a duet.

Policeman:

He seems a bit wrong somehow.

Laborer:

You should 'a seen the other one.

{Curtain}